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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 04 AMMAN 000980

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/23/2013

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SUBJECT: PILLARS OF THE REGIME PART III OF IV: JORDAN'S
ARMED FORCES AND SECURITY SERVICES

Classified By: Ambassador Edward W. Gnehm. Reasons 1.5 (b,d).

Summary

11. (C) As Jordan prepares to face a possible war on its Eastern border, and then looks beyond the immediate crisis to longer term challenges, the Jordanian Armed Forces (JAF), General Intelligence Directorate (GID) and Public Security Directorate (PSD) will serve as key pillars ensuring the stability of the monarchy. Throughout its modern history, Jordan's military and internal security services -- drawn predominantly from its East Bank and Circassian populations -- have been a loyal and dependable source of support countering any threats to the regime, whether from within or without. While the immediate and looming crisis with Iraq will test the strength and cohesiveness of these institutions, we expect that they will rise to the occasion -- as they have during every previous crisis in the nation's history. Over the longer term, the GOJ will face potential stresses on these pillars from government reforms, economic changes and social pressures. End Summary.

Always There When It Counts

12. (C) Throughout Jordan's modern history, the Hashemite Monarchy has depended on its military, intelligence and security forces to protect the kingdom from external threats, to infiltrate groups before they could act on their anti-regime ambitions and to maintain order when popular passions threatened to boil over. At each critical juncture in Jordan's recent -- and not so recent -- past, these pillars have protected the stability of the Kingdom and guaranteed the continued rule of the Hashemites.

13. (C) Over the past several years, with increased Al-Qaeda activity in Jordan, a public inflamed by the Intifada next door, and now a war with Iraq looking ever more probable, the preparedness and effectiveness of all three of these organizations -- the GID, JAF and PSD -- have never been more critical.

GID

14. (S) The GID is undoubtedly the most powerful of these three key organizations -- in the eyes of most Jordanians, the real "power behind the throne." The GID maintains a mystique among the general population as the institution that "knows where all the skeletons are hidden." Responsible both for internal and external intelligence, the GID's presence can be found in all corners of society. Traditionally, Jordan's small but very Hashemite-loyal Circassian minority has played an outsized role in the organization, along with other East Bankers. The GID has always been well-funded, something that has allowed it to successfully recruit many of the country's best and brightest into its service. Family tradition also serves as a strong motivating force for service. The GID's influence, always substantial under King Hussein, has grown even stronger since the accession to power of King Abdullah. Its present Director, General Sa'ad Kheir, is arguably the King's closest advisor and confidant. Using an array of sophisticated tools and methods, the GID keeps close tabs on groups and individuals that may pose threats to the regime.

JAF

15. (C) The present-day JAF is a direct descendent of the legendary Arab Legion, and officers and enlisted soldiers alike who serve in the nation's armed forces are proud of this lineage. Like the GID, the vast majority of Jordan's armed forces are East Bankers. Entering the JAF or the RJAF (Royal Jordanian Air Force) is seen as a career commitment, with most soldiers and airmen serving twenty-year stints. For many East Bankers of modest backgrounds, getting into the military has been, and continues to be, seen as an opportunity to gain steady employment, learn marketable skills, access the networks of "wasta" (connections) that are

crucial in Jordanian society, serve their country, and -- for some -- be sent to the U.S. for training. The primary mission of the armed forces is to protect the Kingdom's borders, whether from an invading army or from individuals and groups that would seek to use Jordan to smuggle weapons or drugs, or engage in acts of terror. On those few occasions when unrest has turned bad -- such as the Black September civil war or (on a much smaller scale) unrest in Ma'an in late 2002 -- the JAF has been called in to assist police in restoring order.

PSD

16. (C) The PSD is among the most professional and competent police forces in the Arab world. The PSD's responsibilities include investigating crimes; protecting the Royal Family, senior government officials, foreign diplomats and other dignitaries; border crossing point security; and -- the one with the greatest potential for internal political repercussions -- crowd control and suppression of civil disturbances. Drawing almost exclusively from Jordan's East Bank populations, the PSD -- like the GID and JAF -- has long been seen as an avenue of opportunity for young men (primarily) from modest backgrounds to serve their country and provide reliable income for their families. Under the leadership of its current Director, former JAF Lt. General (and U.S. Army Ranger-trained) Tahseen Shurdom, the PSD has embarked on a coordinated effort to upgrade its training and technological capabilities (much of it supported through the DOS's Anti Terrorism Assistance (ATA) program). General Shurdom is not the only military general to join PSD's ranks recently. There is a clear desire to infuse PSD with military quality training and discipline for the events coming soon.

The Immediate Challenges Ahead

17. (S) The possible war with Iraq will provide an immediate test of the capabilities and loyalty of these three key organizations. While there are clear differences in the missions of each, they would be united in carrying out GOJ policies that -- at least in the beginning -- would not be popular with many Jordanians seeking to demonstrate pan-Arab solidarity with Iraq. That said, if coalition forces are welcomed as liberators in Baghdad and relatively little blood is spilled, this initial burst of pro-Iraqi sentiment may lose much of its anti-American flavor and could transform into something potentially positive. If, however, military action results in prolonged combat and high numbers of Iraqi civilian casualties -- and Jordanians see their government as complicit in this action -- the potential for anti-American, and possibly anti-Hashemite, popular unrest could grow appreciably. The GOJ leadership fears that such an outcome -- coinciding with a spike in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and/or acts of violence perpetrated by Iraqi agents or al-Qaeda inside Jordan -- could pose challenges of a unique magnitude for the state.

18. (C) While various "nightmare" scenarios can be envisioned, the behavior of the security forces over the past 2 1/2 years provide some indication of their current state of readiness. Since the Intifada began in September 2000, the PSD has improved its crowd control techniques, recruited over 1,200 new riot control police officers and, except in a limited number of occasions, been able to avoid the use of force to maintain order. The PSD would seek to use this experience to defuse situations before they result either in violent confrontations with demonstrators or, equally as bad, the unwillingness of its forces to confront mobs. Until now, PSD cohesion has been firm, even in the face of difficult situations.

19. (C) For example, in April 2002, following the IDF's assault on Jenin, the fiercely loyal Badia police were deployed in Amman to prevent large-scale demonstrations. The Badia's presence was a clear signal to protest organizers "not to cross red lines" and proved an effective deterrent to large rallies. Even though the vast majority of Jordanians (and probably security officers themselves) agreed with most of the protest organizers' views, planned actions to "march to the Israeli Embassy and burn it down" were canceled and the most virulent calls by opposition groups dissipated significantly soon thereafter. The November 2002 standoff in Ma'an with Salafist Islamic extremists provided another test of the PSD's readiness to protect the regime. While there has been criticism of the GOJ's handling of this situation (specifically that the PSD's approach, in this case, was too confrontational), the PSD did what was asked of it by the political leadership. PSD was actively supported by JAF and RJAF forces in Ma'an.

10. (C) The JAF, in the immediate period ahead, will be

focused on protecting Jordan's borders, responding to any humanitarian crisis that might arise should there be an influx of Iraqi refugees, and if required, bolstering the PSD to ensure calm and order within the Kingdom. The JAF has earmarked the entire special operations command for suppression of possible internal turbulence in Amman and Zarqa. The King, PM, FM and other senior GOJ officials have repeatedly told the Jordanian public that the JAF will not be involved in any military action against Iraq. While there have been reports of lower level JAF personnel airing personal views sometimes sympathetic to Saddam or even Bin Laden, there is no indication that this has become widespread or problematic for JAF operations. That said, soldiers in the JAF are not immune to the sentiments of frustration with U.S. policy prevalent in Jordanian society as a whole.

¶11. (C) While the GID's immediate tasks are formidable, many of the threats that it is working to root out have foreign connections, a factor that makes it less likely to have domestic political ramifications. Going after Iraqi agents and Al-Qaeda cells who would seek to commit acts of violence and destabilize the Kingdom is something most Jordanians see as fully justifiable.

Over The Longer Term

¶12. (C) Assuming the GID, JAF and PSD handle the near-term challenges successfully, all three institutions (but particularly the JAF and PSD) will still face longer term structural issues in the years ahead. On a philosophical level, there is the question of how, or if, more Jordanians of Palestinian origin can be incorporated into these organizations. Memories of "Black September" in 1970 and questions of loyalty still deter the GOJ from allowing significant numbers of Palestinians to serve in sensitive positions. It is likely that until some solution is found to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Jordan will be unable to resolve its own internal tensions between East and West Bankers and the ethnic makeup of these institutions will remain essentially unchanged.

¶13. (C) On a more concrete level are questions of salaries, expertise and talent. Given the limited job opportunities for young Jordanians in provincial East Bank communities, the numbers seeking entrance into the military or PSD greatly outstrips available slots. In an average year, for instance, 18,000 Jordanians will apply to fill the roughly 2,000 new available slots in the JAF. Typically, meritocratic criteria have played a less important role in the selection process than tribal or other "wasta" factors. These patterns, which may have been acceptable in the past, will prove more problematic as the JAF (in particular) becomes a more technology-based force that demands selection more on qualifications than on connections.

¶14. (C) A related issue concerns the JAF's ability to attract and retain individuals with high-tech aptitudes and skills to a military career at low pay when such skills will be in high demand at better pay in the private sector. As it currently stands, the majority of career soldiers earn very modest incomes. Army Captains, for instance, earn about 208 JD (USD 291) per month. (Note: Jordanian soldiers earn substantially more when serving overseas in international peacekeeping operations, an important factor in the GOJ's strong support and involvement in such missions. End Note.) The PSD will face similar issues as it too has embarked on an ambitious program to upgrade the technological component of its work. The GID, because of its traditionally higher salaries, faces less pressures from this direction.

¶15. (C) Another challenge will be finding a politically acceptable way to reform the overly generous military pension system, which the IMF has said places the largest burden on the government budget and largest impediment to the government's goal of reducing debt and reliance on foreign aid. The military pension system currently runs a deficit equivalent to 3.2 percent of GDP and will peak at 4.5 percent of GDP over the next 15 years. Pension benefits provide an important unearmarked source of income, particularly to the tribal and rural areas from which the military recruits. Government proposals, supported by the IMF, to reduce benefits and increase contributions and length of service requirements are likely to be a major bone of contention in relations with the military and security services over the next few years.

Comment

¶16. (C) Like the other "pillars" of the regime -- the tribes and the economic elite -- Jordan's military, intelligence and security forces have benefited from the more than eight decades of Hashemite rule. To ensure the loyalty and

effectiveness of these institutions in the years ahead, the GOJ will need to ensure that it targets its resources properly so that those who are tasked with carrying out sometimes unpopular actions are provided the tools, training and compensation to do so effectively and enthusiastically.

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